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SIRHAN BISHARA SIRHAN

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14 **UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**
15 **CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**
16 **WESTERN DIVISION**

17 SIRHAN BISHARA SIRHAN,
18 Petitioner,
19 vs.
20 GEORGE GALAZA, WARDEN, et al,
Respondents.

) Case No.: CV-00-5686-CAS (AJW)
)
) DECLARATION OF NINA RHODES-
) HUGHES
) **Hon. CHRISTINA A. SNYDER,**
) U.S. District Court Judge
)
) **Hon. ANDREW J. WISTRICH,**
) U.S. Magistrate Judge
)
) **Date:**
) **Time:**
) **Courtroom:**
)
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27 I, NINA RHODES-HUGHES, previously and at all times mentioned herein known as NINA
28 RHODES, declare:

1 I am a United States citizen, over the age of eighteen years, and if called as a witness in
2 the above-referenced proceedings I could competently testify to the following:

- 3 1. In the spring of 1968, I was a fund raiser for U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy's
4 presidential campaign.
- 5 2. On the night of June 4-5, 1968 I was at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, having
6 been invited there by Kennedy campaign officials. Senator Kennedy and hundreds of his
7 supporters, of which I was one, were all there that evening to celebrate his anticipated
8 victory in the California Presidential Primary.
- 9 3. Shortly after Midnight on June 5, while Senator Kennedy was standing on a stage in the
10 Embassy Room ballroom of the hotel delivering his victory statement following the
11 primary, I was waiting for the Senator backstage. I was to bring him to Pierre Salinger's
12 press room, which was a small room to the right from where I was standing. I had been
13 requested by Mr. Salinger, a top Kennedy aide, to escort the Senator to that press room
14 for interviews after the Senator's victory speech.
- 15 4. I believe that I must have been facing the back of the Senator as he was speaking
16 onstage, although I couldn't actually see him while he was speaking because there was a
17 curtain immediately behind him.
- 18 5. Moments after Senator Kennedy finished his speech, I saw him walking in my direction
19 just after he had exited the ballroom stage. Suddenly I saw the Senator rather forcefully
20 being turned to his right (my left), which was a direction that was directly opposite the
21 direction that I had promised Mr. Salinger I would bring the Senator. I ran after the
22 Senator and a tall blonde man in a tuxedo who was escorting him down the hall. I
23 shouted to them, "No, no, you're going the wrong way!" I continued running after them,
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1 still shouting to them. The Senator was being led into the hotel's kitchen pantry. I
2 followed into the pantry.

3
4 6. Inside the kitchen pantry, I could see that Senator Kennedy had stopped for a moment to
5 shake hands with someone. At that point, the Senator was turned to his left. So, because
6 I was behind him, I could see the Senator in left-profile as he was greeting the person.
7 The Senator then turned to his right and began heading in the same direction he had been
8 headed when he had entered the pantry -- meaning that he was now headed towards what
9 I later learned was another Kennedy press room, located in the hotel's Colonial Room.

10
11 7. I was about 6 to 7 feet behind the Senator, and I could see the back of his head and part
12 of his shoulders and his back as he was proceeding onward, when suddenly I heard
13 sounds that seemed like camera flashbulbs going off. I was looking at Senator Kennedy
14 as the first 2 or 3 of these popping sounds went off and the Senator did not appear at that
15 moment to have been wounded by those first couple of shots.

16
17 8. These initial 2 or 3 popping sounds were coming from my left, so I immediately turned
18 to my left. It wouldn't be long before I would realize that these sounds must have been
19 gunshots because there was now a commotion taking place ahead of me and to my left.

20
21 9. I saw Rafer Johnson and Rosie Grier suddenly run to this same spot just ahead of me to
22 my left, and that is where they joined other men who already were in the process of
23 trying to subdue a dark skinned man with a blue denim jacket. At one point, the man in
24 the jacket turned and twisted over, bending to his left, apparently to avoid being tackled.

25
26 10. While this man was being subdued, by several people, more gunshots continued to my
27 right, where Senator Kennedy had been located.
28

1 11. These shots to my right continued in a more rapid fire and with a different sound. I was
2 ducking and screaming “No, no!” The bullets were flying seemingly everywhere. I saw a
3 man slide down a wall and it appeared to me that he might have been shot.
4

5 12. The Senator had disappeared from my view. I realized that the Senator had been shot
6 when I saw him lying on the floor with blood next to his head.

7 13. I screamed, “No, no!” I fainted. I don’t know how long I was out. When I came to, I
8 discovered that I had been trampled because my dress was wet, the belt from my dress
9 was gone and my shoe was off.
10

11 14. I stood up and I saw Ethel Kennedy kneeling by the Senator’s side. There was blood
12 next to him. I ran from the kitchen crying “He’s dead, he’s dead, they killed him!”

13 15. My then-husband Michael Rhodes tried to calm me down. I broke away from Michael
14 and ran to the Salinger press room where I was told to stop saying that the Senator had
15 been killed.
16

17 16. I counted a total of between 12 and 14 shots fired in the kitchen pantry from the two
18 different locations.

19 17. I do not know how much time had elapsed but at one point that evening I went into the
20 ballroom and I sat on the steps of the stage to be alone. A man approached me with a
21 microphone and asked me for details of the shooting. I told him that Senator Kennedy
22 had been shot and that there were about 12 to 14 shots fired and that other people had
23 been shot in addition to the Senator.
24

25 18. As this man continued to question me, I became upset and told him to go away because
26 he was being insensitive to me, disregarding my feelings. He then left me alone. It's my
27
28

1 impression that this man was probably a news reporter who had tape-recorded me. I
2 wish there was a way to locate the recording he apparently made of what I told him.

3
4 19. My then-husband and I remained at the Ambassador Hotel for a while and then finally
5 went home. Later I learned through news reports that the man in the blue jacket who I
6 had seen being subdued in the kitchen pantry was Sirhan Sirhan.

7
8 20. I wish to also say that roughly about an hour before Senator Kennedy came downstairs
9 at Midnight to deliver his victory statement in the Embassy Room, another Kennedy
10 supporter and I noticed something that bothered us at the time. This other Kennedy
11 supporter was Lucy Salenger (my spelling of her name here is an approximation and my
12 understanding is that she was not related to Pierre Salinger).

13
14 21. While Lucy and I were backstage, behind the Embassy Room, we noticed that a guard
15 who had been posted that evening at the backstage stairway, which led only downstairs,
16 was suddenly gone from his post at the stairs and never returned. The guard's sudden
17 disappearance from his post (which must have happened sometime around 11:00 pm)
18 really bothered us because his presence there during the evening had been one of the
19 very few signs of security that we noticed that night. It just seemed very strange to both
20 of us, at that time even before Senator Kennedy came down and delivered his speech,
21 that this guard would suddenly leave his post and that he never returned, especially after
22 he had been there at the stairway all evening. In case it ever becomes important to
23 mention this, I remember this guard as a short man with a dark complexion.

24
25 22. The FBI came to my home a few weeks after the assassination. Two FBI agents
26 questioned me. At one point, they asked me if I had been wearing a polka dot dress on
27 the night of the Kennedy shooting. I told the agents "No, it was champagne colored."
28

1 23. Years later, I learned that there actually are films and videotapes showing me on the
2 night of June 4-5, 1968 -- both before and after the shooting -- wearing my champagne
3 colored dress. I told the two agents that I had heard about 12 to 14 shots during the
4 shooting and I volunteered to be a witness at the upcoming Sirhan Sirhan trial.
5

6 24. They left my home after questioning me for a short time. They also left behind their
7 attaché case in my living room. They phoned me about 10 to 15 minutes later to tell me
8 that they were coming back to retrieve it. By that time, I already had discovered that they
9 had left behind their case, and I had phoned a neighbor to come over and stay with me
10 and to vouch for me that I had not touched the case.
11

12 25. Months passed and, as it turned out, I was never called to testify. I also was never given
13 a copy of my FBI interview summary to look over or to sign. All throughout these first
14 years following Robert Kennedy's assassination, I was never asked to -- nor did I ever --
15 sign any statements whatsoever concerning the Senator's murder.
16

17 26. In the early 1990s, a gentleman named Professor Philip Melanson contacted me. He was
18 interested in re-opening the Robert Kennedy case. We spoke for quite a while. He then
19 sent me a copy of my 1968 FBI interview summary, which I had never previously seen. I
20 was shocked when I saw it for the first time. It was filled with more than a dozen mis-
21 statements.
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23 27. For example, it said that I had heard 8 shots fired in the kitchen pantry and that they had
24 sounded like firecrackers and it also said that I had seen red flashes during the shooting.
25 None of that is true.
26

27 28. Now I have never said -- and would never say -- that the entire FBI interview summary
28 was incorrect. In fact, in the summary there were indeed some accurate statements

1 attributed to me, such as my description of Sirhan Sirhan's clothing for example. But
2 more than a dozen of the summary's statements that the FBI attributed to me were
3 wrongly attributed to me.
4

5 29. I understand that there is also an LAPD report that claims police officers interviewed me
6 and that it had some of the same erroneous information as the FBI report. I want to make
7 it clear that I was never interviewed by the police at my home.

8 30. Finally, Brad Johnson of CNN telephoned me in March of 2012 and, in talking with him
9 about my remembrances of the Robert Kennedy assassination, I became only too willing
10 to come forward publicly and to assist, if possible, in bringing out the truth concerning
11 this most tragic, historic event.
12

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14 I DECLARE UNDER PENALTY OF PERJURY UNDER THE LAWS OF THE
15 STATE OF CALIFORNIA THAT THE FOREGOING IS TRUE AND CORRECT
16 AND THIS DECLARATION IS EXECUTED ON JANUARY 6, 2013, AT
17 WOODLAND HILLS, CALIFORNIA.
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21 /s/ _____
22 NINA RHODES-HUGHES
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